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Printing Industry In Nepal

By

Pushkar L Shrestha
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Nepal saw its first printing press back in 1851, imported from Great Britain as a result of the first historic visit of the then Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana, and was used for several decades for printing official papers and documents. The remnants of this press now kept in National museum still reminds the long forgotten story.

In 1872, an enthusiastic gentleman Mr. Kuber Ratna Bajracharya became the pioneer by constructing a crude printing press of size 12" x 16" made from iron bars and plates all manufactured by himself and named it "Buddha press". Surprising enough, this crude press continued to offer its full service for nearly fifty years.

Then came 1950, the new era in Nepalese history. The modern press came into existence and since then, the modernisation process has continued and so far, there are eight hundred one printing press registered, including the modern offset press that totals eleven at present, out of which seven belongs to private sector. However, estimate shows, only nearly four hundred fifty presses are still at business.

AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY

Press technology has been always in the least priority. Apart from the personal endeavour by the Zealous persons like Kuber Ratna Bajracharya in 1872, Ghenendra Sumsher Rana who manufactured "Narayan Press" and Vishwananda Bajracharya who was able to construct a whole lithograph machine in 1910 all by himself, nothing had been done to develop the press technology on institutional basis. In this respect, Nepal is still fully dependent upon the technology transfer from the other countries. Zinc block, wooden block or super castings are the only things that are done by the locals, super casts, mostly lead type are carried out by local methods, but lack of good finishing and limited choice of letter varieties again leaves one handicapped and finally has to depend upon India.

Techniques

Quite a no. of hand press operate still at large. Silk screen printing, offset and even computer print techniques are appearing and getting popular.
these days. Approximately 90 per cent printing press use letter press techniques. Individual lead cast letters being hand picked and composed as according to the text, features the traditional method of printing which are still being used almost everywhere in Nepal except where they do have the modern facility of monotype, laser print or photo type set.

Right from classical machines such as Hopkinson, Orient to the modern ones including web offset, Dominant and Hydelberg are operating in Nepal simultaneously. Some of the modernised press are well facilated with gallery camera, dynograph D.G. 962 camera, lithography Nuarc camera etc., powermatic T-65 developer, plate coating machine and Nuarc plate exposure etc. are efficiently used in such places.

As far as the colour printing is concerned, Nepal still lacks the colour scanning machine, though the facility of printing two colours at a time is available in some offset press. For multi colour printing, the customers still prefer to print the materials in other countries mostly Thailand, Hongkong, Singapore, Japan and India.

The difficult access to necessary chemicals, ingredient, and other raw materials (Infact, 100% of these have to be imported), the lack of skilled technicians, and poor quality paper, all these are the major causes for the setback in printing technology.

ECONOMICS

It is estimated, at present, Nepal is spending about 20 million US dollars, annually in the printing business which is all funnelled to other countries like Japan, Hongkong, Singapore, Thailand and India. For a small country like Nepal, it is not amusing story. The press operating in private sector finds it quite difficult to survive as there is no motivation from the Government. No solid steps has been carried so far to encourage the press business by Government. The printing cost comes quite high as compared to the cost in India. The lack of definite policy of His Majesty's Government of Nepal also is discouraging to the press industry. If one is going to import certain raw materials, one has to go through such a long bureaucratic process, that it wishes, it has never to come back again.

All these lead to the major set back in press industry in Nepal.
CONCLUSION

As you know, I myself represent a monthly magazine "Kamana". At present, the major problem for the publication of magazines like "KAMANA" arises from the press itself. As the no. of offset press are very much limited, we have to struggle very hard to fight with time, to get it printed at the desired date. As a simple example, we have to do our own designing and fixing layout etc. leaving the only readymade printing part, and even then there is always a long delay from the press. The only alternative seems, we have to own our own press. How far that is practicable to own an offset press by a monthly magazine, that is another question to ponder over?

We are unable to meet the demands of our customers only due to the difficulty arising from the press. We still believe, we can double our circulation, once, we get on with the press. In this context, we have also applied for a loan according to the new policy taken by His Majesty's Government towards press industry, but unfortunately, nothing has materialised so far.

I believe, this gathering today may also serve as a guide line for us, and any suggestions will be highly appreciated. I am really grateful to Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre for the kind invitation to me to participate in this workshop. I also believe, I shall be able to return to Nepal with broad knowledge that I shall earn in this workshop seminar.

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